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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. ARMS PROCUREMENTS

1. Summary: Major Chinese-language Taiwan dailies continued to focus their coverage December 9 on the personnel reshuffle in the DPP and Cabinet, the planned merger between the KMT and the PFP, and other local issues. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, ran a banner headline on its front page that read: "Two Kidd-class Frigates Arrive in Taiwan." The pro-unification "United Daily News," on the other hand, carried the latest results of a poll survey on its front page, which said 57 percent of the people polled said they do not support the idea of PFP Chairman James Soong running for Taipei City mayor.

2. In terms of U.S. arms procurement, the "Liberty Times" is the only paper that carried a Reuters news story on its page two with the headline: "U.S. Military Leader Urges Taiwan to Continue Pushing for the Arms Procurement Bill." In addition, an editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" said Washington blasts Taiwan for not spending enough on defense but refuses to approve weapons systems that Taiwan's Defense Ministry had requested. The editorial also criticized the Bush administration's incompetence and arrogance, saying "the lasting effects of his foreign policy blunders may take years to bear bitter fruit for the U.S., but they are already degrading his country's options here." End summary.

"Bush, an Emperor with No Clothes"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] said in an editorial (12/9):

"The Bush administration has proven itself adept at undermining the political and the strategic standing of the U.S. across the globe. . Most importantly - from Taiwan's perspective - the optimism that greeted Bush's outspoken support for this country in 2001 in the face of China's threatening attitude has now disintegrated. Bush and his advisers appear to be at a loss as to the implications of developments in Taiwan's political arena, and this has been reflected in the way Washington deals with such contentious issues as the procurement of US arms. .

". Washington blasts Taiwan for not spending enough on defense, even as it refuses to approve weapons that the Ministry of National Defense has requested. . The U.S.' reasoning was that these weapons are offensive, not defensive, in nature. One does not have to be a Clausewitz fanatic to understand that in terms of the strategic application of military power, Taiwan is in no position to launch an assault on China. And since this is the case, why limit the tactical options available to Taiwanese commanders, should they one day have to defend their country? .

"Yet this disconnect in U.S. policymaking is not the provenance of the military alone, and it speaks of a misunderstanding of Taiwan's political situation. Many Taiwan observers in the US have interpreted the Democratic Progressive Party's tribulations, and the subsequent support that the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) has received, incorrectly.

"There is no question that the fortunes of the administration of President Chen Shui-bian are at a low ebb, and that the status of KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou is rising. However, analysts should be careful to interpret this phenomenon in the context of domestic politics, and not as an indication of a major shift in Taiwanese attitudes toward cross-strait policy. .

"Incompetence and crass arrogance have been a hallmark of bush and his Cabinet since his first day in office. It is only recently that this has translated into a lack of support for him domestically. The lasting effects of his foreign policy blunders may take years to bear bitter fruit for the U.S., but they are already degrading his country's options here."

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